2,000 yards, whereas our longest runway was only 1,500 yards, the trying nature of my job becomes apparent.

One morning, whilst endeavouring to raise the back wheels of our vehicle out of the mud, assisted by a team of willing Arabs who had suddenly appeared out of the flooded desert, I fell into conversation with an old fisherman. 'There will be no more rain after to-morrow,' he said, looking up at the cloudy sky. 'It will be fine for several weeks.'

Since I had been informed by the Indian Meteorological Office only two hours before that there were no signs of any immediate break in the weather, I wanted to know where he acquired this information.

'The birds have come to the lake,' he answered. 'Also I found a locust in the sand just now.'

I had noticed that, on a small lake formed by the heavy rains, a large flock of seagulls had settled, but attached no importance to this. However, I smiled at the old man and thanked him for his information, believing that he was just babbling in his old age. Two days later the rain ceased and we had a dry period of blue skies and sunshine of six weeks' duration. Not that this proves anything, only I now consider it unwise to dismiss all Arab lore with a laugh.

Our Dakota aircraft now came in with regularity, and it was a pleasant change to meet people who had just arrived from England, or who were returning home from the Far East for the first time since 1941. They stayed for about half an hour, taking coffee and biscuits in the mess whilst the aircraft refuelled; sometimes the delay was longer, especially if a complicated load had to be changed, or some minor deficiency of the engine had to be remedied. After each landing, the station engineer had to make an overhaul and check the refuelling operation, and it was largely due to this fact that not one accident occurred during the whole of my experience on the route. True, the Ensign is a very fine aircraft and its Whitney-Pratt engines are among the best in the world, but the fine record of safe flying which our airlines enjoyed was also due to expert and efficient maintenance at the bases and at stopping points *en route*. The Ensign has been criticized because it is old and slow; it was first put into service in 1938, and has had a new type of engine since then. But it is extremely safe and comfortable, and I do not think anyone objects to travelling at 130 miles an hour under those conditions.

It was my custom during the visits of aircraft, after I had met